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Message Text

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PAGE 01 SEOUL 00748 301003Z

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01

USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /027 W
---------- 102124
R 300904Z JAN 76
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5250
GFFO RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 7921
CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MILI, KS
SUBJECT: PRESS REACTION TO SECDEF REPORT

SUMMARY: LOCAL PRESS HAS DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE FRONT PAGE AND EDITORIAL SPACE TO DEFENSE SECRETARY RUMSFELD'S FIRST ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS. PRESS HIGHLIGHTED SECRETARY'S REMARKS ON IMPORTANCE NE ASIA AND ROK TO U.S. SECURITY, AND CONSEQUENT NEED FOR CONTINUED U.S. DEFENSE COMMITMENT TO ROK, INCLUDING U.S. TROOP PRESENCE. AT SAME TIME, EDITORIALS WARNED OF DOMESTIC U.S. PRESSURES FOR TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND URGED MAXIMUM EFFORT TO BUILD SELF-RELIANT DEFENSE DURING REMAINING TIME AVAILABLE. END SUMMARY

1. LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE OF SECDEF REPORT EMPHASIZED STATEMENT THAT N.E. ASIA IS OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE TO U.S. SECURITY AND THAT ROK IS IN TURN "ESSENTIAL" TO THE N.E. ASIAN STABILITY. PAPERS REPORTED IN SOME DETAIL SECRETARY'S REMARKS TO HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE THAT WITHDRAWAL U.S. GROUND FORCES FROM ROK WOULD JEOPARDIZE STABILITY OF REGION. SEPARATE STORIES QUOTED SECRETARY, IN ANSWER TO QUESTION, AS SAYING U.S. WILL NOT REMOVE NUCLEAR
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WEAPONS FROM ROK IN ORDER NOT TO WEAKEN DTERRENCE.

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2. EDITORIAL REACTION TO SECDEF REPORT WAS FAVORABLE. GENERAL INTERPRETATION OF REPORT WAS THAT IT GAVE CLEAR REAFFIRMATION U.S. DEFENSE COMMITMENT. TONGA ILBO JANUARY 29 NOTED THAT REPORT HAS ENDED FEAR THAT RECENT REPLACEMENT SECRETARY SCHLESINGER SIGNALED CHANGE IN U.S. COMMITMENT. TONGA ALSO DESCRIBED AS "NOTEWORTHY" THAT FOR FIREP TIME U.S. GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS N.E. ASIA TO BE EQUALLY IMPORTANT TO U.S. SECURITY AS EUROPE.

3. CHUNGANG ILBO FOUND NO INDICATION THAT U.S. DEFENSE COMMITMENT HAS CHANGED. LACK OF MENTION OF ANY SPECIFIC U.S. RESPONSE TO NORTH KOREAN ATTACK WAS INTERPRETED AS RETURN TO NORMAL U.S. POSITION AFTER POST-INDOCHINA HARDLINE STANCE AND, IN PART, A REFLECTION U.S. PUBLIC SENSITIVITY ABOUT AUTOMATIC U.S. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN HOSTILITIES. CHUNGANG WARNED THAT TO SECURE U.S. DEFENSE AID SMOOTHLY WITHOUT OPPOSITION FROM U.S. PUBLIC AND CONGRESS, ROK MUST STRENGTHEN ABILITY TO REPEL NORTH KOREAN ATTACK WITHOUT U.S. GROUND FORCES.

4. HANKUK ILBO PRAISED SECDEF FOR ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF KOREA'S IMPORTANCE AND FOR BACKING CONTINUED U.S. FORCE PRESENCE. AT SAME TIME PAPER WARNED KOREANS NOT TO OVERLOOK CONTINUING PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL PRESSURES TO WITHDRAW U.S. FORCES. AS RESULT ROK MUST MAKE MAXIMUM EFFORT DURING TIME AVAILABLE TO BUILD ECONOMY AND SELF-RELIANT DEFENSE. ERICSON

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